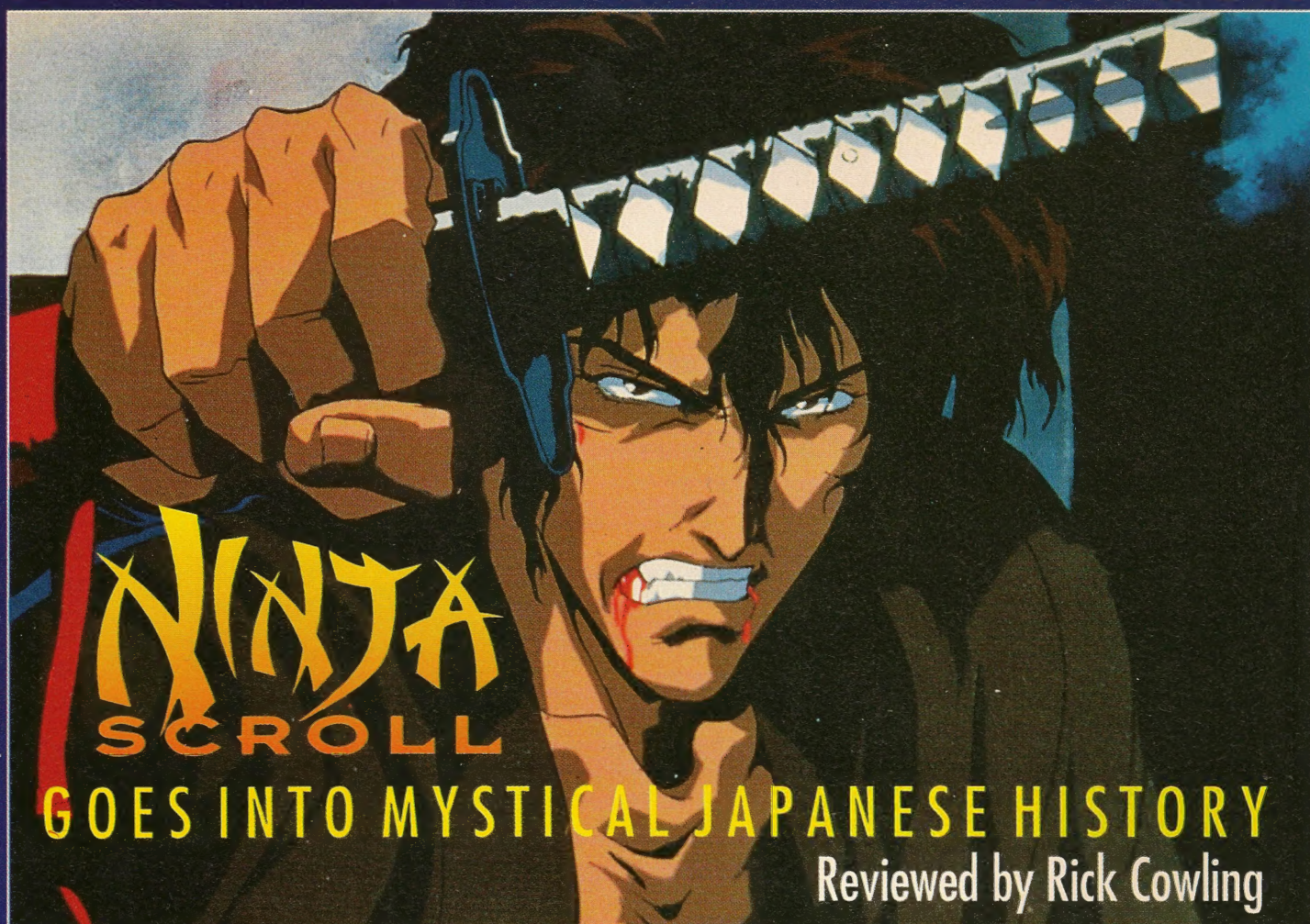
The cover art is a dynamic, anime-style illustration. At the top center, a character with long black hair and a red sash is shown in a dynamic pose, holding a sword. To the left, a character in a white robe stands under a large, checkered umbrella. In the foreground, a character with long black hair and a red sash is shown in a dynamic pose, holding a sword. To the right, a character in a blue and white patterned kimono is shown in a dynamic pose, holding a sword. In the background, a large, skeletal, and monstrous figure with a wide, toothy grin is visible. The overall color palette is dominated by blue, red, and yellow, with a checkered pattern in the background.

IMPACT
PRESENTS

NINJA SCROLL

SOUVENIR BROCHURE

A CUTTING EDGE FROM MANGA



An odd title for a video. Lots of ninjas but no scroll! This anime is set in the feudal

Tokugawa period of Japan (late 16th to late 19th century) and tells the tale of a

masterless ninja called Jubei who sells his skills to the highest bidder or just cause. He becomes embroiled in a plot to overthrow the ruling shogunate when he rescues Kagero, a female ninja

from being raped at the hands (and other bits) of a huge man-demon whose skin becomes as hard as stone.

work for the Shogun of the dark (who rules the criminal underworld); the shadowy figure behind plot. He is saved by a wizened old man who then slowly poisons him and tells him that if he doesn't help him find out who's behind the plot to overthrow the Shogun - the old man is a ninja working for the government - a grim fate awaits. What follows is a series of set-piece fights between Jubei and a plethora of supernatural warriors, and plotty-bits which over the course of the film explain exactly what's going on. Also, just to stop you getting bored (as it), there's the love interest between Jubei and Kagero (who pops up again) where you discover that her entire body is poisonous to the touch! Probably the best fight is between Jubei and a blind swordsman in a bamboo forest. The whole

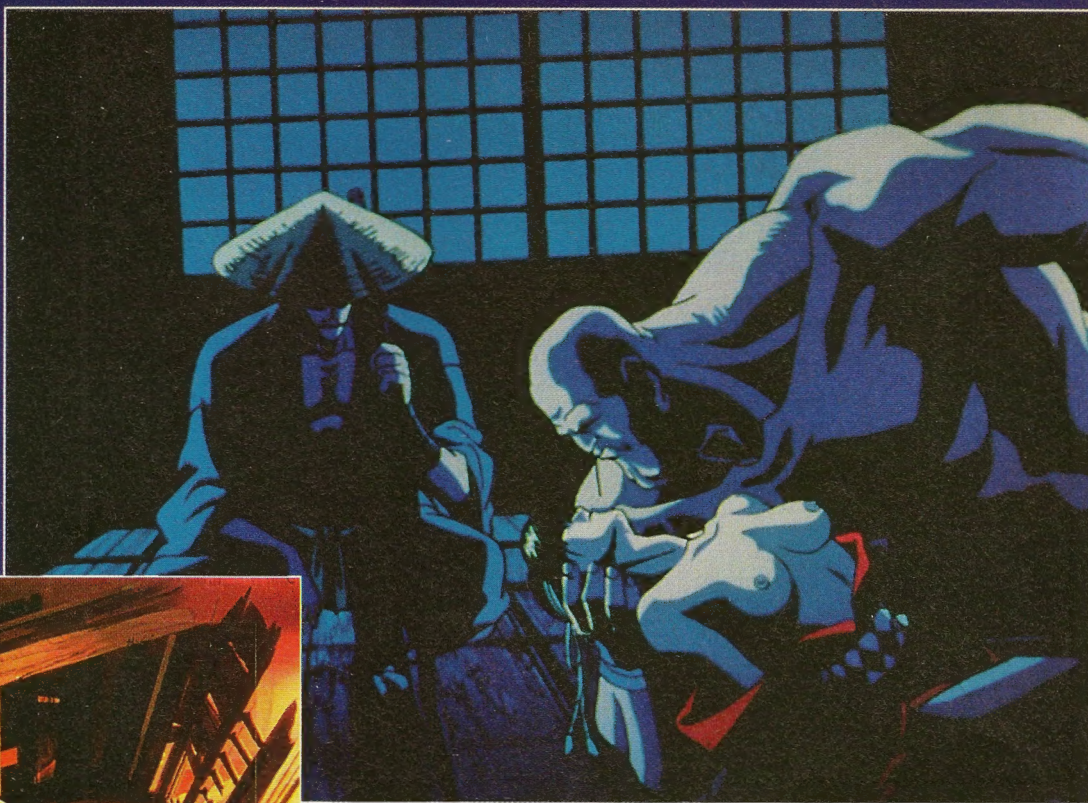


Believed to be a spy for the government, Jubei is attacked by supernatural assassins who



piece is fast paced, well choreographed and excellently directed. Not forgetting the little twist at the end, Superb! Though that isn't to say that the other fights are rubbish.

The whole film has a stylish air to it. It is well animated and the direction throughout is well handled. I understand that there were some problems with the translation from 17th century Japanese to English and that does show at some points, but on the whole it's not terrible. Maybe it should have been dubbed more like *Arislan*, you know,



like the old *Flashing Blade* series the BBC used to show on Saturday mornings when I was a kid. Then again, maybe not. I like the fact that you *have* to watch it to follow what's happening. No character just tells you what's going off and I prefer that. For those of you that don't, you can just fast forward to the action.

The animation is smooth and consistent as expected from Yoshiaki Kawajiri (who also did *Monster City*, *Wicked City* and *Cyber City Oedo*) and even though he doesn't do the character designs on this one (like he did on the rest) his influence can still be seen throughout them all. Despite all the good things I've said there's something about it I'm just not sure of. Having seen Kawajiri's other stuff, *Ninja Scroll* just doesn't seem quite as together as his earlier work. Was I expecting too much? Maybe I'm just jaded. If you've got fourteen quid to spare and



like to see animated people kicking the stuffing out of each other (especially at the end) then maybe this is one for you.

NINJAS

There is a lot of stuff written about ninjas and most of it is probably wrong! It's obvious they were used as assassins but most historical information says that their main work was spying and intelligence gathering, but this doesn't make for exciting anime does it? There is very little real information on ninja that doesn't seem to have some form of supernatural element to it, which only helps to maintain the myth of the ninja as being something more than human. It's a good job for Eric Van Lustbader, too!



OTHER MYSTIC WARRIOR AMIME

Ninja Scroll isn't the only one that deals with these themes. In Japan there's a whole slough of them! Here's a quick run-down of some that may (or may not) get released in the U.K..

Yotoden

Ninjas using mystic weapons to slay demons that work for Oda Nobunaga (a real historical person who was instrumental in forming the Tokugawa Shogunate) as he rises in power and unifies Japan (which he did). Bases itself more in fact and a lot of mention of real historical events. Good story and animation.

Saint Seiya

The Greek gods have returned and their warriors are (called saints) the hardest of the hard. This t.v. series ran for ages and followed one saint's (called Seiya) rise to glory from his lowly beginnings as a Bronze Saint to become a powerful Gold Saint while having the living phlegm kicked out of him every episode! Whole fights lasted several episodes at a time.

Bastard

Not an insult! A title. Dark Schneider, the most powerful (and psychotic) exploder wizard is trapped in the body of Luche, a small boy and only the kiss of a virgin can



release him. When the acolytes of the evil goddess Anthrathrax come a calling on the kingdom of Metalliane, Luche may be the key to their salvation or ultimate destruction!

Hakkenden: Legend of the Eight Dogs

Based on Japanese literature this one is about a princess whose clan is destroyed by a rival clan. During the destruction of the clan's castle, the princess's dog is also killed. Its soul is split into eight parts which are reincarnated as eight warriors who eventually meet and go on a revenge kick against the opposing clan.

Dagger of Kamui

Based on comic strip which ran for years and is set in 19th century Japan. The ninja Kamui is trying to escape from his clan, learn his own origins and discover the secret of a mystic dagger in his possession.

